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A FEW

PLAIN QUESTIONS

TO THE

WORKING PEOPLE OF SCOTLAND.

30
JUN
78

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SCOTLAND.

A NEW EDITION.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

1793.

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A FEW

PLAIN QUESTIONS, &c.

Friends and Countrymen,

AT this time, when ſo much pains is taken to miſlead and hurt you, there needs no apology from any man of common ſenſe for giving you advice, and telling you his mind. I am no arguer nor politician; but I know *truth*, and can ſee *a ſtate of facts* as well as thoſe who are; and, in that view, I beg leave to put ſome queſtions to *you* and *your friends*.

1. Theſe gentlemen endeavour to perſuade you, that you are an *oppreſſed* and a *miſerable* people. I aſk you, Did you know this before they informed you? and what kind of miſery and oppreſſion can it be which the ſufferer did not feel or find out for himſelf, but muſt learn from another perſon, and that other a ſtranger to him and his ſituation?

I would aſk you too, How a people can be oppreſſed, where every induſtrious man receives better wages, has a better houſe over his head, puts better clothes on his back, and better meat in his belly, than his father did before him, or ever hoped to do?

Further, I would aſk you, What is the difference between your ſituation now and two years ago, when all was peace, contentment, and good humour, among you? Is there any difference but this, that the country has improved, and trade and induſtry have thriven *ſtill* faſter than before; and that, looking to our neigh-

bour kingdom, France, we have ſtill more cauſe of thankfulneſs to Providence, that we are not, like her, laid waſte with war and murder, and, in all points, going on from bad to worſe, in the highway to perdition?

Have you not too the ſame good King upon the throne, whom, not four years ago, the whole nation prayed for as for a father? and what has he done ſince, (I challenge his enemies to tell you, if they can), that you ſhould now cry out againſt him as a tyrant and oppreſſor?

II. But (ſay your friends) you are oppreſſed, becauſe the nation is loaded with heavy taxes.—And out of whoſe pockets, I aſk you, do thoſe taxes chiefly come?—From thoſe who have wherewith to pay, or thoſe who have it not? The houſe, window, and land-taxes, the tax on offices, carriages, ſaddle-horſes, and ſervants, the taxes on all the coſtly articles of dreſs, or furniture, or living, are theſe paid by the landholders and the rich, or by the labouring people, who have no ſuch things belonging to them? Some taxes, I grant you, there are, which are paid by all, but ſtill only in proportion to their means. And for what reaſon have your wages riſen, but becauſe your expence of living is greater, owing to thoſe very taxes. Take off thoſe taxes, and down fall your wages—where is your profit then?*

Beſides, *How* are theſe friends of yours to take off theſe taxes? By declaring the nation bankrupt (ſay they), and ſtriking off the national debt—and indeed it is clear, that while the debt remains, ſo muſt the taxes to pay the intereſt. Now, pray, where would be our relief in that? The creditors of the nation are, for the moſt

* It is a well-known fact, (but, I dare ſay, your friends have concealed it from you.) that over all Europe, wherever taxes are few, there wages are low in proportion; and the caſe would be the ſame with you if our taxes were leſſened.

moſt part our own people—Britiſh ſubjects—and above all, they are our own traders, manufacturers, and artiſts, who have truſted to the nation, as to a ſafe bank, the ſavings and earnings of the induſtry of their whole lives. All theſe honeſt and worthy people your reformers are to cheat and beggar at one blow. And ſo this capital remedy turns out to be, that we are to ruin one half of our people, in order to relieve the other; who, (as I have ſaid above,) will be juſt where they were, by the fall of wages, after all—An excellent ſpecimen this, both of the wiſdom of thoſe politicians, and of their notions of honeſty and juſtice!

III. They tell you next, you are oppreſſed becauſe the public money is thrown away on the expences of a Court, and in great ſalaries to officers and placemen. This is a plauſible thing to ſay; but the anſwer is very plain, and I bring the thing home to you at once. How would you look upon a Sheriff or a Lord of Seſſion that could not keep a decent coat on his back, or upon a King that had none to wait upon or attend him? If men in places of truſt were not ſufficiently paid, who of any education or ability, or truſtworthy, would take thoſe places?—Of what ſervice could ſuch mean magiſtrates be? Who would anſwer or obey them, or be afraid of their authority? or who would put any faith in either their honeſty or ſkill, or could they prove, (as they are meant to be), a terror to evil-doers, and a praiſe to them that do well? There is no one of you, gifted with any ſenſe, but knows and ſees, as well as I who tell you, that without ſome ſhow and ſtate the profligate and evil-doer is not to be kept in awe—Difficult enough it is to awe him, even with that aſſiſtance. The caſe is juſt the ſame in all the other ſorts of office; you muſt pay the men well, or you can have none but knaves to ſerve you, who will ſoon cheat the ſtate and the people out of twenty times the ſum, that has been ſaved upon their ſalaries.

IV. What ſay your friends next? That you are not *a free people*, becauſe you have no vote in the choice of the members of Parliament. Now, my friends, if the want of *that* is the want of freedom, then are you only in the ſame condition with nineteen out of twenty of thoſe whom the reformers chuſe to call your oppreſſors. The richeſt manufacturer, merchant, or farmer; a writer or an advocate; a ſurgeon or phyſician; a miniſter of the goſpel, an officer of the army, a judge of the Court of Seſſion or Juſticiary, as little has any of theſe a vote, unleſs he has land, or bears office in a burgh. So, at the very worſt, theſe perſons, according to this notion of freedom, are all ſlaves along with you; yet (with a very few exceptions) all theſe orders of perſons are content with their lot, and are making no complaint on the ſubject.

But, when your friends tell you, that *voting*, and this alone, is freedom, they tell you a falſehood. True *freedom* is freedom *from injury*. It is the protection of Law, in life, perſon, property, and reputation. Which protection who is there among you, the loweſt and moſt deſtitute, nay, the moſt vicious and criminal, that does not enjoy to ſuch fullneſs and degree, as was never enjoyed in any country but ours? Not the moſt notorious miſcreant and robber, whom a whole country wiſhes to be rid of, but muſt have his ſolemn and expenſive trial, and ſuffer a conviction on full lawful proof, by verdict of his country, e'er the higheſt authority in the land, even the King himſelf, can touch a hair of his head. In a land where *this* is ſo, to tell the honeſt and induſtrious man that *he* is not free—*he* whom both State and King are for their own ſake intereſted to encourage, is an impoſition and inſult to his common ſenſe. Who can take any thing from him? Who can conſtrain, hurt, or meddle with him in his outgoings or incomings, or in any of his connections or concerns? He has freedom of thought and conſcience—freedom of ſpeech and writing—freedom of conduct and action;

action; ſo he but walk by the ſcripture rule of doing as he would be done by. It is ſecurity in theſe points that makes the *freedom*, becauſe it is theſe that make the *happineſs*, of the rational and well diſpoſed man. As to a vote or ſhare in the government, that is not matter of *freedom*, but of *vanity* and *power*, which only the reſtleſs and the proud man is anxious for, to ſatisfy his ſelf-conceit, and which, God knows, are not the way to happineſs, but to corruption of heart and vexation of ſpirit? What ſignifies (it is an obvious queſtion), how or by whom the Parliament is choſen, if it is ſuch a Parliament as ſecures the people in the above-mentioned ſubſtantial enjoyments: chooſe it any way you will, it cannot do you more good. That is the end, the ſole end, of their being choſen at all; and when we are in poſſeſſion of the end, why in the name of wonder would we quarrel with the means by which we have gained it?

Do but look about you and ſay,—thoſe ſmall burghs which have a ſhare in the elections—what the better are they for it? Such a place as Lauder, for inſtance, or Jedburgh, Kintore, or Inverury, and many others which ſend a member to Parliament; is it there that trade and manufactures are thriving? Or is it at Hawick, Paiſley, Greenock, Mancheſter, and Birmingham, which have no ſhare in elections whatever? Nay, is it not notorious, that the former places are kept mean and beggarly, and idle, by means of thoſe very votes, on which theſe friends of yours would perſuade you, that all good things depend. The reaſon is plain; they truſt to theſe votes, and not to their induſtry, for bread.

Look in the next place over the water, to that country, (France) which theſe ſame friends of yours point out to you as a pattern, and deſcribe as a Paradiſe; and take your choice of Britiſh freedom, ſuch as we have it, or of French freedom ſuch as they have had for theſe two years paſt. There, to be ſure, every man has *freedom of vote* in all things. And along with it

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what has he more? The *freedom* of being at the mercy, in all things, of all the miſcreants in the kingdom: The *freedom* of having his houſe burned, his goods plundered, his wife and children knocked in the head, and himſelf tucked up at a lamp-poſt, without judge or trial, or time to ſay his prayers.—And all at the inſtigation of any ſcoundrel, who diſlikes his face, or who owes him money, or has taken a fancy to his effects. Theſe are the precious fruits of the French *Reform*. Is it poſſible that any creature, not in bedlam, or fit for it, can think ſuch a ſtate deſirable, or that the malice of any being (but Satan himſelf) could wiſh ſuch miſery, not to ſay to his own native country, but to any country or people on the face of the earth?

V. Another argument of your friends is this, "All "men ſhould ſhare in the government, becauſe all are "fit for it; and of all things, the eaſieſt and plaineſt is "the making of good laws." A ſtrange diſcovery indeed—that a thing is fit for all men, the dulleſt and moſt ignorant, which has till now been often felt too much for the wiſeſt and moſt enlightened. Has any of you occaſion for advice in his own affairs? he goes to the beſt ſcholar of his acquaintance, or to the beſt informed and moſt experienced of his neighbours. But the nation, it ſeems, is to be adviſed in its affairs, which concern us and all our children, by thoſe who can neither write nor read, nor had ever time to ſpare a moment's thought from the care of their own ſubſiſtence. To teach a man to make a ſhoe, or ſhape a coat, you bind him apprentice for many years, and on no other terms do you think him *worthy* to enter into any of your corporations; but he may be free of the great corporation of government without *any* apprenticeſhip, or education, or trial of ſkill; and the making of wiſe laws to rule a whole land, is, it ſeems, a *ſimple* craft, in which every man is to ſet up for himſelf, upon his own ſtock of knowledge, or with no ſtock at all.

Here look to France again, and ſee how this has ſucceeded. Following this plan, has not that great country landed,

landed, in the courſe of three years, in having *no* laws, *no* government, *no* order or rule, in any one thing of either private or public concern.

In ſhort, my friends, it is plain common ſenſe, that ſuch affairs are only fit for the handling of men of knowledge and condition, who have leiſure to think about them, and to make themſelves maſters of the ſubject; and this never was doubted till now.

It will not anſwer the purpoſe to cry out, (as theſe reformers do), that Parliament muſt be reformed, becauſe it is proſtitute and corrupt.—Nothing is eaſier than to give foul names; and it is eaſieſt to thoſe who have dealt longeſt in the practice: But where is the proof of the charge? Has not the nation proſpered under this Parliament, and through all ranks and orders of the people, beyond example? Where is there a country ſo thriving, and ſo happy, ſo powerful, and ſo much admired by other nations! Has not the money of all Europe been flowing into our public funds? are not the diſtreſſed and perſecuted from all quarters, at this moment, flying into it for refuge? Know the tree, I ſay, from the produce: It cannot be a poiſonous and rotten ſtock that produces ſuch abundance of excellent and wholeſome fruit. I aſk, too, where are the cruel and unjuſt, or arbitrary laws, which this corrupted Parliament has paſſed againſt the liberty of the people? That there are none ſuch, the very proceedings of theſe reformers prove: For if Parliament were *unjuſt*, they would be *jealous* too; and to reſtrain the liberty of ſpeech and preſs, would be the firſt they would think of. No one would be allowed to wag his tongue againſt them, as now is done every where, not in holes and corners, but in public ſtreets, and in the face of day. If, however, your pretended friends go on in the way they are doing, their ſeditious practices muſt be reſtrained, and every honeſt man will wiſh Parliament to reſtrain them, and to prevent them from ruining you and us all.

VI. Another reaſon, it ſeems, why you are *not free*,

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is, that ſome have great eſtates, and ſome have none at all. But let thoſe levellers anſwer this: How were great eſtates at firſt made, but by induſtry and good fortune? and who will be induſtrious and active, if he and his are not to enjoy his gains? Would they have a law made, to hinder a poor man from turning rich, as numbers among you are now daily and happily doing? Obſerve too how far this will go. If a Duke or Earl has not right to his great eſtate, what right has the portioner or feuer in any village to his? What right has the ſhopkeeper to his ſhop, the tenant to his tack, the corporation to its privileges and freedoms, the maſter-tradeſman to the work of his apprentices and ſervants, or any working man to his comfortable meal, while there is a beggar in the ſtreet that wants it? All and each of theſe rights depend on the eſtabliſhed law of the land, protecting property as it happens to ſtand: Deſtroy it as to the great properties, and the ſmall will not be long of following.

Obſerve too the conſequence.—For who but the rich take off the rare and coſtly manufactures, ſo various that it would take a day to tell them? And what then is to become of the many many thouſands who find their bread in the making of theſe articles?

Obſerve too the impiety of this equalizing plan.—For ſince property has been unequal in all ages and countries, what is this but a charge againſt Providence, for having ordered and directed, from the beginning of time, a ſtate of injuſtice and oppreſſion?

VII. I have ſeen a third reaſon given to convince you that you are not free, namely, That there is a law for quelling mobs by military force. But what their meaning in this can be, it is difficult to conceive. Do they mean to ſay, that a mob is a right and lawful thing, or not a thing to be afraid of, or that they ſhould be ſuffered to take their courſe, burning, plundering, and deſtroying at their pleaſure? To complain of this, then, is to complain of being protected againſt the

moſt

moſt dreadful calamities and misfortunes, and that the orderly and quiet are not given up to the profligate and abandoned. It is to complain of the law, and civil magiſtrate: For when the military does act, it is not of itſelf, or by its own authority, but by order of the ordinary civil magiſtrate, in whoſe hands it is a mere inſtrument, juſt as his officers and conſtables are on any common occaſion.

VIII. Your friends, however, aſſure you, that they are alſo the friends of *order*, and enemies to all mobbing and diſturbance. Bnt how does their diſlike of them appear? In their labouring to fill your minds with diſcontent, jealouſy, and rage; with an opinion that you are wronged, fleeced, and oppreſſed; with every feeling, in ſhort, to make you deſperate and impatient, and to move you to exceſſes. 'Tis juſt as if a man ſhould toſs a match into a barrel of gun-powder in his neighbour's houſe, and aſſure him that he meant no harm, and that if any fire ſhould happen there, he might depend on his aſſiſtance. So far their diſlike of tumults is, however, I believe, ſincere, that they will not appear in them perſonally themſelves; that is, they will puſh you on to run the riſk of your lives and perſons on the ſpot, and leave you in the lurch to anſwer the law for your attempt thereafter.

IX. One queſtion more I have to aſk you. What ſort of people, in general, are theſe Reformers in thoſe articles, by which you commonly diſtinguiſh good men from bad? Are they, for the moſt part, the moſt reſpectable and worthy perſons in your town or quarter of the country? Frugal and attentive to buſineſs, juſt in their dealings and thriving in their trades, decent and exemplary in their converſation and behaviour, punctual in the payment of their debts, indulgent to their ſervants and dependents, dutiful to their families, and charitable to the poor? If they do not anſwer this deſcription, you are ſurely very ſimple to expect any good from them. †

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† What can be the reaſon why the FRIENDS of the PEOPLE never publiſh a liſt of their names and deſignations? Which are they aſhamed of, their cauſe, or themſelves? Have not the people right to know who their friends are?

Let me, before I conclude, give you one ſound piece of advice. Be always ſuſpicious of great promiſes, and of the man who pretends too high a zeal and concern in *your* cauſe, when it is not *his* cauſe, and where there is no natural call on him ſo to do. That man, depend upon it, has ſecret and intereſted ends of his own to drive; for it is not in human nature that one man ſhould take great trouble, and run great riſks, and make great ſacrifices, for perſons he is a ſtranger to, and with whom he has no connection. Take my word for it, all this ſupport from people above you—all this printing, and meeting, and ſpeaking,—all this proffer of ſupport with heart, hand, property, and perſon, neither are nor can be without ſome proſpect of profit to themſelves, from a commotion and diſturbance. And what the motives are, you can be at no great loſs to ſee, if you but look at the men. If they were in general men of property and ſubſtance, holders of place and employment in the land, or having proſpect of preferment in that way; and if you ſaw them laying down theſe places and employments, or putting that property to hazard, for your ſake, it would then be ſome earneſt of their ſincerity and good intentions. But you know, or ought to know, that this is not the caſe. That ſome ſincere and well-intentioned, but deluded, perſons are amongſt them, I am indeed, in charity, bound to believe; but for the greater part of theſe pretended patriots, is it not public, that they are either needy men, who have no poſſeſſions to venture, or men who have been mortified in their ambitious or greedy projects, and who having thus forfeited all title to favour or advancement, are deſirous of change or commotion, in the hope that things may be turned upſide down, and ſo themſelves brought to the top.

What is moſt material, and the beſt touchſtone of any—Of what principles are they in matters of religion? Freethinkers, Unitarians, Socinians, and the apoſtles

poſtles of I know not how many new creeds, made after their own conceit and fancy. Some of them, indeed, go a ſtep farther, and have freed themſelves from what they call the *ſhackles* of religion altogether. This is a part of their admiration and imitation of the French. In the French Aſſemblies, you cannot but have remarked, even the pretence of belief in a God or a future ſtate is ridiculed and laid aſide. The abuſes of *their* religion may be ſome excuſe for their errors and extravagancies. But what ſhall be our excuſe who profeſs the *true* and the *reformed* religion, if we take theſe wild and wandering lights as our guides upon our way.

Let me here conclude. You know theſe things to be true.—Make the right uſe of them before it be too late. You know how you are; how ill you may make yourſelves no man can tell you.

A FRIEND OF ORDER.

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JUN